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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1578
INFO RUEHZM/GCC COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS RIYADH 001213

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP (HARRIS, BERNDT)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: Saudi H1N1 mitigation efforts continue for Hajj and schools; two cases at the American International School

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Saudi Government continues to actively monitor cases of H1N1 and has started a nationwide awareness campaign to reduce the threat of transmission. The number of infections and deaths has remained steady. The Saudi Government is working with foreign governments on measures to protect the health of religious pilgrims, both for Umrah and for the upcoming Hajj (beginning at the end of October). The Ministries of Health and Education are actively debating how to handle the risk of infection in schools. The government will make a final decision on September 29 whether to delay the scheduled October 3 start of school. The American International School in Riyadh has reported two cases of infection. Saudi tour operators and hoteliers report significant cancellations, particularly by foreign travelers, during Ramadan and are concerned that they could experience significant losses during the Hajj. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ministry of Health (MOH) has confirmed 26 H1N1 deaths and 3,500 total H1N1 cases in the Kingdom as of September 11, and Minister of Health Rabeah said in press reports that 98 percent of H1N1 patients have recovered, Makkah reportedly had 265 H1N1 cases and Medina 206 cases as of September 7.

¶3. (U) The Ministry reportedly has distributed 500,000 brochures in Riyadh, including on busy Tahlia Street and at Hayat Mall. The MOH launched an awareness campaign in Jeddah's King Abdul Aziz International Airport involving pamphlets and signs which recommend eight H1N1 preventive measures. Four stands reportedly monitor incoming Umrah pilgrims by requiring travelers to complete health cards and pass by thermal cameras. Econoff saw several large signs with H1N1 preventive measures in King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh. The Health Ministry has started a national H1N1 awareness program in recreation sites including inside several malls which are normally crowded during Ramadan nights. Awareness leaflets have also been distributed in mosques.

¶4. (SBU) The MOH signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education to cooperate on issues related to health and potential H1N1 outbreaks in schools. The agreement reportedly covers several health issues and states that the MOH will provide the MOE with health awareness material on swine flu and train personnel on detecting the illness. The MOH also will organize an H1N1 awareness program. There has reportedly been an active debate between the Ministries of Health and Education about whether to postpone the opening of schools, currently scheduled for October 3. As of September 13, the SAG has decided not to postpone the opening and has set up special training for doctors and school officials to improve their ability to diagnose swine flu. The government will make a final decision on September 29, based on the number of flu cases.

¶5. (SBU) The American International School of Riyadh reported September 14 that two students have been diagnosed with H1N1. The school subsequently sent a notice asking parents to check their children's temperatures every morning, and asking students to stay home for seven days after developing symptoms, and students must be

fever-free for at least 24 hours before they can return. School officials have consulted closely with the Ministries of Education and Health. The Ministry of Education has issued a protocol for international schools, outlining steps that should be taken when H1N1 cases are diagnosed. If 10% of the students are diagnosed with flu symptoms (or 5% for daycare) in any week, or if two or more students are admitted to an ICU with this flu, the school, in consultation with the Ministry, may close the school for seven days.

The Ministry also requests that schools set up areas to isolate students with flu symptoms (e.g., infirmaries), provide infected students masks and conduct awareness sessions for parents. The American school received a sizeable donation of hand sanitizers, which have been installed in the hallways and classrooms. It has also conducted two awareness sessions for parents, and has set up an email notification system and provided for remote access to classroom materials in the event of a closure.

16. (SBU) Several countries are reconsidering their plans to send Hajj pilgrims. Some have reportedly reduced the number of pilgrims they will authorize this year (e.g., Egypt is considering reducing its planned number by 40%). Tour operators and hotel firms in and around Makkah are reporting considerable numbers of cancellations. Traffic for Ramadan Umrah has been lower than hoteliers expected, with hotels reporting up to 50% cancellation rates, costing an estimated \$80 million in lost revenue.

MUENCH